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801 Warrenville Road

Lisle IL 60532

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CONTACT: Jan Strasma (630) 829-9663
Viktoria Mitlyng (630) 829-9662

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E-mail: opa3@nrc.gov

NRC TO MEET WITH OFFICIALS FROM AMERICAN ELECTRIC POWER COMPANY TO DISCUSS SAFETY PERFORMANCE AT D. C. COOK

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with officials from the American Electric Power Company on Thursday, April 10, to discuss the results of NRC's annual assessment of the D. C. Cook nuclear power plant, located in Stevensville, Michigan.

The meeting will be held at 5:30 p.m. at the Park Inn Conference Center, 4290 Red Arrow Highway, in Stevensville. The public is invited to observe the meeting, and NRC officials will be available before the conclusion of the meeting for questions and comments from the public.

A March 4 letter from the NRC to the American Electric Power Company addresses plant safety performance during the previous year and forms the basis for the meeting discussions. The letter indicates that, overall, D. C. Cook operated safely.

The NRC uses a performance-based regulatory safety inspection program, which utilizes a color-coded scale of increasing levels of safety significance, beginning with "green" and progressing to "white," "yellow" and "red." The oversight process uses performance indicators submitted by nuclear power plants and findings from NRC's inspections to evaluate each plant's safety performance. These findings fall into seven specific areas, or "cornerstones," which are key indicators of the safety of a plant's operations. When the regulatory process identifies two "white" issues in the same cornerstone, this cornerstone is considered "degraded." Having a "degraded" cornerstone is not an indication that the plant is unsafe, but it does result in heightened regulatory attention.

The letter indicates that two findings of low to moderate safety significance were identified by the NRC and resulted in degraded performance in the Unit 2 Mitigating Systems cornerstone. The first finding was associated with failures of the Unit 2 auxiliary feedwater pump to start. (This finding is described in an NRC press release dated May 20, 2002). Details on this finding can be accessed on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/REPORTS/cook_2002005.pdf. The second finding was associated with improper installation of an essential service water system strainer, which affected both units. (This finding is described in an NRC press release dated October 8, 2002). Details on this finding can be accessed on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/REPORTS/cook_2001017.pdf.

The March 4 letter also addresses a substantive cross-cutting issue in the area of problem identification and resolution. The NRC conducted a problem identification and resolution inspection, which "identified several issues with the adequacy of apparent cause evaluations and with the implementation of corrective actions." The letter further states, "Based on the continued identification of findings associated with poor corrective actions, the NRC is concerned that your performance in this area is on a declining trend. You are requested to specifically address the actions that you are taking to improve performance in this cross cutting area at the end of cycle public meeting."

The letter is available from Region III Public Affairs Office and on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/cook_2002q4.pdf.

In addition, the letter notes: "As you are aware, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the NRC has issued several Orders and threat advisories to enhance security capabilities and improve guard force readiness. We have conducted inspections to review your implementation of these requirements and have monitored your actions in response to changing threat advisories. For calendar year 2003, we plan to continue these inspections and conduct portions of the security baseline inspection program, as well as perform additional inspections to evaluate your compliance with new requirements that may be ordered."

Current performance information for D. C. Cook is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/COOK1/cook1_chart.html.
http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/COOK2/cook2_chart.html.

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